
JOURNAL OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Social networking, what next?

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ARTICLE INFO

JEL Classification:

O31
O33
M31
Z1

Keywords:

Social networks
Virtual reality
Community
Micro-blogging
Open Authorization

ABSTRACT

Social networking is a disruptive technological change which took place in the last decade. Social networking has change the way we communicate within our groups, with our fellow citizens, the professionals and many unknowns. The technological advancement has created challenges in various areas like law and order, legal, sociological, psychological and economical. In this paper we are going to cover in brief about social networking, the impact it has created and the future of social networking.

Journal of Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior
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1. Introduction

The Social Networks is a disruptive technology which has changed the way individuals communicate. Almost every fourth person on earth is using either of the social networks. You can express your views on social subject instantly. The opinion of an individual is heard. The revolutions kick started through social network. The dependency on media is slowly shifting. For latest breaking news, social media is checked instead of TV. Eventually media and TV will merge. The geographical constraints have been broken through social network. You can communicate in a language which you may not be aware of because of availability of translators. Even while you are away from home, you are well connected with family members, you can send message, talk and even send photographs.

It is true that most people think alike; up until now, most people just did not have a way of expressing their views within a collective group of millions of people. Twitter and Facebook have made this possible and governments, businesses and social agencies are paying attention to views expressed on networking media. As a matter of fact, social networks are constantly being monitored for various activities that could disrupt societies and for extremist attitudes that have the potential to catch on with millions of followers. Networking sites made the world a smaller place and people are now able to share a global consciousness through the use of the social networks.

There are a few thousand Social Networking Sites. Top social networking site includes Facebook, Twitter, and What's app etc. followed by bunch of other social networking sites or Apps which are generic but less attractive or the generic ones. Ranking of social networks is stated in Table 1.

Table 1

Ranking of social network sites (October 2015)

Social Network	Number of unique monthly users (in Millions)
Facebook	900
WhatsApp	700
Twitter	310
Linkedin	255
Pinterest	250
Google+	120
Tumblr	110
Instagram	100
Vk	80
Flickr	65

Note: A user may be member of more than one social network.

2. Internet, Intranet and Beyond

Social networking generally treated as networking across the internet. There is a huge social collaboration takes place within organization. Most of the learning organization has their internal network and everyone within organization gets connected through intranet. The effective use of social collaborations has created a big positive impact on collaborative growth of learning organizations.

The following diagram (Figure 1) illustrates intranet and internet. The network within organization is intranet. The firewall controls the access to and from outside network.

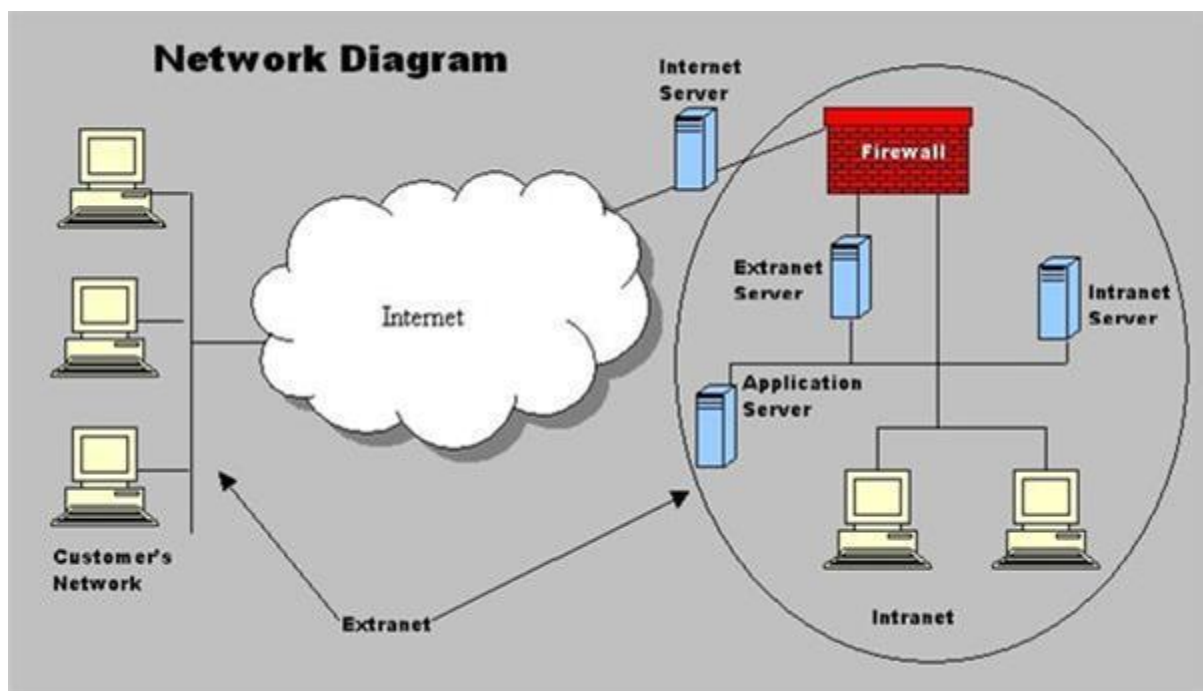


Figure 1

Internet and Intranet

These social collaboration platforms generally have features essential to interact like individual's page, microblogging, blogging, publishing contents like audio, photos, videos etc. This network is also used to share in schedule of important organizational activities like social events etc.

Next step taken by tech savvy organizations is to provide a collaboration channel to share learnings, gather ideas from other people within organization. This encourages people within organizations to work collaboratively and to understand learning of the other areas within organization. The most important is seeking help from experts to get effective solution for problems. The organizations are now trying to find out creative solutions by including experts

from outside of the organization. The classic example is www.kaggle.com seeking solution for the data analytics related problems.

3. What has changed with Social Networking?

With introduction of social networking there is drastic change in communication. In the month of December there was flood in Indian city Chennai. Many of us were worrying about the well-being of relatives and friends living in Chennai. After a day of flood, on Facebook many of us have received notifications from them that they are safe. What a big relief? It is a power of social network.

Now let us understand the changes in life because of social networking.

1. Choice of what to publish?

Newspapers and other publishers have traditionally served as institutional barriers between people who wanted to speak and their intended audience. One who would like to communicate to many has to bear the cost of communication. The Internet eradicated that barrier. With transmission costs no longer at issue, any speaker could communicate anything to the world, at times anonymously. In essence, the individual became the sole decider of what is news worthy. And there are fewer physical or technical limitations on the amount of content that can be published.

2. Choice of where to Publish?

The constraints on writers to publish thoughts has now been reduced or removed. Now you can share your thoughts on microblogging sites which can be seen by the entire world instantly. However if you would like to publish book or an article, there are two methods applied. The first one is declaration by the site owner stating that the content and ownership is completely with author and we are just place to host the contents. In this case all liability lies with Author. E.g. publishing an article on www.linkedin.com. It is instant publishing. The second is to have editor or reviewer for each article or blog to verify the originality and appropriateness of contents to publish. Both of these methods have advantages and drawbacks.

The people believe in complete ownership with author have an argument that we are owner of platform, the usage of platform is decided by the users. A few of the governing bodies have highlighted the misuse and requested these providers to check the fishy contents and remove them from the site.

3. Anyone can participate in the sharing thoughts

The best part of this communication is anyone can share their thoughts. Each one on the network is treated equally. The international issues catch attention of masses in very short time. A few months ago, a picture of small boy travelled as refugee from Syria has become viral. That resulted in catching up attention of entire world toward the migrant issue from western Asian countries. The European countries have to declare their capacity of accepting migrants. The newer topic has been opened that whether a nation can reject refugees. Various thoughts have been shared on virtual media platforms.

With the internet the geographical constraints have been removed. Anyone on the earth can communicate with the person in completely different geography even when he or she is not aware of the specific language.

4. Definition of community has been changed

Earlier the group of persons stationed at one location having similar intents comes together to sharing information or perform activities associated to common interest. Internet has changed limitation of a location. Now virtual community can be formed without interacting face to face. To share knowledge you do not need all members to present at one place. You can share your thoughts at your convenient time; you can express your opinion on some other individual's thoughts or share something which you have liked. The time required to perform these activities is very less.

Prior to internet or before google, we were heavily dependent on the printed material. Many a times if we do not find required information in printed material, we used to either do R & D or the specific topic used to remain incomplete or problem remain unsolved. Now contents of more than a billion Google searches per day helps solve many problems. However there are no collaborative efforts to solve the problem. There are few solution providers who help in problem solving. The technical problem solvers are kaggle.com, hackhands which is now part of Pluralsight. Kaggle.com is a platform to state data related problems faced by the organizations and data scientists across the globe solve these problems. Hackhands has a set of software experts to provide solutions of developers. If someone is stuck with technology problem and would like to seek help from technical experts, Hackhands expert joins online and help resolve the problem. In fact they can take control of your machine to understand the problem and solve. It is paid service.

5. Reaching out to wider audience has become easier

Now the entire world is your audience. No constraints of geographical constraints. However when you are sharing a post or blog you have to ensure that the published contents are global enough. If any specific local word or term is used, need to be specified for benefit of global readers. You can share your thoughts AS IS and in the format you may like. It may be text, picture or video.

6. Price of contents

The best part is most of the social networking is free. A few sites have made premium versions (with extra features) chargeable. The prices are nominal but that offers special services like additional features, analysis of the activities you have performed etc.

This has allowed everyone to participate in the communication. Most of the social networking platform providers may be residing in specific geographic location but the users of these social networking sites are across the globe. This has effectively led to capture the customer base for social networking sites and make as user friendly as possible.

7. Time to get the response

It is instant. The human brain has very short memory and it would be difficult to recollect all instances in your life. However human brain has a mechanism to relate instances based on the similarity of instances, opposite of previous instance or based on the learning from an instance. The social media reaction is the fastest one. You may post something which may create waves or gets viral. The person from the target audience can decide to express like or dislike, can express views and share article within his contacts.

8. Open Authorization

Most of the sites have user authentication. The entire user community has experienced problem of managing passwords of multiple sites. With Open authorization initiative a user can now login most of the websites using social networking credentials. This is major contribution of the social networking platform providers.

4. Impact of These Changes

1. Growth in writer community

In earlier days there were gates to publish something. Writer has to submit the text to paper media. The editors will evaluate the contents. The evaluation includes writing skills of an author, appropriateness of contents, is the contents in line with the objectives of the media agency, whether the thoughts in the article to be published are appropriate and more importantly it is in line with the objectives of the media. These filters have restricted different views in the media. If someone wants to propagate thoughts which are not acceptable, he has to start his own media like newspaper.

Since internet is open for all and number of sites which allow sharing thoughts in terms of blogs, newsfeeds, tweets and so on. More importantly the quality of contents has improved with the change in digital photography and ease of videography. This has resulted in increase of writer community.

2. Problem of plenty

There are problems of easy access as well as lot of contents. These are as below:

- a. Too much content on social media is available. It is difficult to choose what you want. You may get distracted with a free ride into ocean of information.
- b. Unwanted and unreliable information is available. You have to filter and see authenticity of information.
- c. Forwards have been sent without thinking of understanding the impact of information share. E.g. you may get a message that celebrity has passed away and followed by RIP messages. The message was seen in hurry and reacted without verification.

3. Distance between wish and reality has reduced

The speed of change of technology has reduced the distance between the wish and reality. In last decade not only the change in technology is so fast but also acceptance and adaption of the technology is equally fast. The mobile technology grew very fast and the social media established its roots because of mobile revolution.

4. Might be bullied by a social terrorist

Indeed social networking platforms allow raising voice but all is not well in the platform of social networking. While structuring democratic framework it is expected that the elected members are good and other members in a society respects all participants but at times it is

bullied by a few individuals who are leading for long. There are chances that they may group together and forced to withdraw contents based on the majority. Similarly in social media, there may be chances of group of people who did not like content and starts marking dislike, and adding comments. They do not stop with this. They raise public protest and force to remove the contents, demand apology etc. which may lead to social threats. E.g. In the month of November 2015, V. P. Rageena hosted comments on Facebook about the exploitation inside the madarsas(the religious school of Muslim community) in her childhood in Kerala. There was strong protest of her comments in Kerala which has forced her to express apology.

5. Challenges created with these changes?

1. The paper based publishing becoming obsolete

The paper based publishing like newspaper, periodicals and books is slowly reducing. The Readers Digest has become bankrupt. The number of copies read on electronic devices is much larger. However the serious reading still happens on paper copies and that may be the reason Amazon launched the first physical book shop.

2. Definition of the privacy is changing

The content shared by a person privately sharing with other can be called as breach of privacy. However there is an ambiguity of sharing with number of people can be called as violation. The most important part is the impact caused of private information public. The impact may be psychological, sociological and economical.

3. The demand and expectations of ‘What Next?’ has gone up

The social networking revolution has taken place in the last decade. More than billion people on this earth are hooked on to social networking. Eventually the social networking has been used for connecting friends to connecting businesses, establishing connectivity with the customers as well as vendors and social marketing. Now the governments are using social network to connect with their citizens, understand their views, collaboration in deciding government policies which is big change in last couple of years.

All these advancements in social life have increased expectations about ‘What Next’ in social networking.

6. What Next?

The users are definitely expecting much more impact of social collaboration in coming years. Thinking in user's perspective below mentioned innovations can make the social collaboration more effective and will help bringing world together.

1. Review of periodic activities

Facebook have added a feature 'Year in Review'. At the end of year, the summarized document about the photographs published during the year. This feature was well received by the user community.

It is just beginning... Social networking sites needs to add analytics of the activities performed by the user or by the group or community. This analysis may include problems resolved, extended help, number of likes and dislikes, jokes shared and number of thoughtful discussions etc. There will be analysis of members of a group or community based on the age group of contacts, professions of contacts, nationalities, geography etc. This analysis/analytics will highlight your participation, your group performance and about the group members and contacts.

2. Community of communities

At the moment one can join the community and participates in various activities within the community. The next generation social network will have features like similar communities. The similar community may be on the same social platform or different platform. The community manager will configure similar communities while configuring the community. Social collaboration platform would have mechanism to link communities from other social collaboration sites. To link the communities community manager has to obtain the permission from the owner of community.

When the user posts his or her thoughts on a community, the user will be prompted for posting on other similar sites. If there is community manager for the other community, the post will be sent for respective approvals. In case no community manager for community, the post will be posted automatically.

There will be single place to get different perspective on specific topic. Recently introduced platforms will be noticed early by the users of the other community members. In short this will be google of the social media. There are two different types of social collaboration platforms. The first one is internet based (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.) and the other is

telephone number based (WhatsApp). Managing topics and messages have been done differently in each platform. Combining these aspects and creating new social collaboration journey will be challenging.

3. Virtual reality (VR)

Definitely coming up year 2016 will be the year of Virtual Reality and social media has a scope to utilize VR in a big way. Facebook has acquired Oculus VR in March 2014. Chairman and CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg mentioned in his note at the time of acquisition that Oculus VR have built virtual reality technology, like the Oculus Rift headset. When you put it on, you enter a completely immersive computer-generated environment, like a game or a movie scene or a place far away. The incredible thing about the technology is that you feel like you're actually present in another place with other people. People who try it say it's different from anything they've ever experienced in their lives.

This will get further extended virtual classrooms and chat rooms. Eventual VR has an ability to provide togetherness. This will make social collaboration platforms more popular and part of life for the users of social networks.

7. Conclusion

A major social change has taken place in the last decade with the social networking platforms. The world has come closer with social networking. Any new technological advancement creates challenges and social networking is no exception to that. There are lots of expectations from social networking platforms to improve human life. The technologist will use social networking as a vehicle to improve the connectivity and collaborative working.

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